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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH ANP LEADER WALI KHAN

Summary

1. (C) In a February 22 meeting with the Ambassador, Awami National Party (ANP) Chairman and Member of National Assembly-elect (MNA) Asfundyar Wali Khan, whose name has come up as potential Prime Minister, eschewed any desire to head a national coalition government. The ANP leader is counseling a pragmatic approach toward President Musharraf that looks ahead rather than dwelling on past grievances. His focus at the national level will be working on the political, development, and security issues confronting the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and the tribal areas. Critical of deals with militants such as Baitullah Mehsud, the ANP leader is arguing for a political approach that wins back the confidence of community tribal leaders and a border policy that encompasses close cooperation with Afghanistan and Coalition forces. After five years of Islamist party obstruction, ANP's recognition of, and determination to, tackle militancy in the tribal areas is a breath of fresh air. End Summary.

No Prime Ministerial Ambitions

2. (C) Ambassador and CG Peshawar met the evening of February 22 with ANP leader Asfundyar Wali Khan, whose party had just won ten seats in the national assembly, a majority in the provincial assembly, and routed the religious parties. Wali Khan acknowledged that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Ali Zardari had pitched the idea of serving as Prime Minister in a national coalition government. However, the ANP leader had declined. With only ten seats in the National Assembly, ANP would be in a weak position vis-a-vis other coalition partners. Wali Khan preferred to remain simply a member of the National Assembly, leaving him free to focus at the national level on issues associated with the NWFP and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Wali Khan said that his father and Asif Zardari's father had been close friends, a relationship which was clearly influencing his discussions with Zardari.

Able to Work with Musharraf

3. (C) Wali Khan emphasized the need to look forward rather than back -- counsel that he was providing to Zardari and PML's Nawaz Sharif. He was ready to work for peace in the

NWFP and FATA with President Musharraf, and the two had met on February 21. Wali Khan saw little purpose in picking fights with Musharraf over former Chief Justice Chaudry or presidential/parliamentary powers at a moment when Pakistan had other more important priorities. He told Nawaz that no one was asking the PLM leader "to socialize" with Musharraf, but the business of governing had to proceed. Over time, issues such as an independent judiciary could be addressed, but "let's clip one feather at a time."

#### Governing the NWFP

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¶4. (C) The ANP leader expected his party to be in a position to form the NWFP's next provincial government in coalition with PPP. Wali Khan had pledged ANP's strong support to PPP at the national level in return for a similar pledge from PPP at the provincial level. (Comment: Between ANP's 33 seats and PPP's 17 seats, an ANP-PPP coalition would hold a slim simple majority out of the 99 seats that were up for election. We understand that ANP is also reaching out to independents to improve its margin. End Comment.)

¶5. (C) Wali Khan emphasized the need for a "two-pronged" approach where political, development, and security initiatives in the NWFP and the FATA complemented one another. Administrative isolation of the FATA was a colonial policy that made no sense for a modern Pakistan and needed to be redressed through a series of steps beginning with extension of the Political Parties Act to the FATA and reform of the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The legal presence of all political leaders/parties

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and redress of some of the most egregious provisions of the FCR, particularly collective responsibility, would mitigate against the presence and activities of the militants. Ultimately, Wali Khan envisioned FATA becoming a part of the NWFP.

#### Peace in the Tribal Areas

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¶6. (C) Wali Khan called for greater use of political solutions, drawing on Pashtun customs and traditions, for bringing peace to the tribal areas. The Ambassador commented that, given Baitullah Mehsud's sponsorship of suicide bombings including the attack on Benazir Bhutto, reports of a recent "peace agreement" with South Waziristani militants were deeply troubling. The ANP leader responded that these agreements made him "even more nervous." Baitullah Mehsud and North Waziristan's Jalaluddin Haqqani were the source of much of the violence and instability in the FATA and going after them, he said, must be a top priority. Action was also needed against "clean-shaven fundamentalist" enablers such as retired ISI General Hamid Gul and former Pakistani Ambassador Rustam Shah Mohmand.

¶7. (C) Restoring confidence in the government's capacity and will to protect tribal community leaders was paramount. Public perception that the assassination of nearly 150 tribal elders in the Waziristan area had gone unanswered had deeply damaged the government's standing among those who might otherwise be expected to support the government's priorities. Countering the flow of "Arab money" to the militants was equally important. Wali Khan maintained that training camps in Mohmand agency which had launched suicide attacks against former Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao and ANP in the NWFP's Charsadda district had been paying recruits \$3,000 per month. The 171 illegal radio stations operating in the FATA and areas such as Swat, he said, also required more a forceful response from the government.

¶8. (C) Wali Khan criticized the intelligence agencies for

failing to rotate personnel out of the tribal areas. Some had spent long years in the FATA from the time of the jihad against the Soviets and had built up close, difficult-to-break relations with militants. Despite warnings, the ANP leader insisted that ISI had failed to act on information that his party had provided about training camps and dangerous individuals. Not until General Kayani's tenure as ISI Director General, he said, had there been improvement in taking action.

Working with Afghanistan

19. (C) Wali Khan who has maintained close relations with President Karzai participated in the August 2007 Peace Jirga in Kabul. The ANP leader expressed support for a "cohesive" security policy that included the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Coalition forces. Ambassador noted that while cross-border attacks were down, the volume of violence inside Pakistan was surging. This trend, Wali Khan argued, made tackling the Taliban as opposed to the warlords the highest security priority.

Comment

10. (C) After five years in the political wilderness, Wali Khan sees ANP's dramatic comeback in the NWFP as his greatest political achievement. Thoughtful, articulate, and an ardent Pashtun nationalist, he sees the election results as validation that Pashtuns are by and large a moderate and peaceful people who have been unfairly tagged as synonymous with terrorism. Although short on specifics of how a more political approach would work in the tribal areas, he gives no sign of being interested in peace deals that appease committed sponsors of violence in the NWFP and FATA. Wali Khan offered to share with us a series of policy papers that ANP is preparing on how the new national and provincial governments should proceed on NWFP and FATA issues. While the hard part is about to begin for ANP, its recognition and determination to tackle the deterioration of security in the tribal areas is a breath of fresh air

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after five years of Islamist party obstruction of addressing growing militant violence.  
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